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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: ELECTION SNAPSHOT OF SEVERODONETSK, HOST  
OF THE LATE NOVEMBER 2004 SEPARATIST RALLY

REF: A. 04 KIEV 4355

[1](#)B. KIEV 936

[1](#)C. KIEV 1022

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet  
distribution. Please handle accordingly.

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: We observed Ukraine's March 26 Rada and local elections in the city of Severodonetsk, Luhansk Oblast, site of the infamous November 28, 2004 separatist rally held at the height of the late 2004 Orange Revolution, at which then-PM Yanukovich, many Party of Regions backers from eastern and southern Ukraine, and Moscow Mayor Luzhkov suggested that eastern and southern Ukraine might pursue separatism rather than coexist under an "Orange" government in Kiev. Severodonetsk's vote went relatively smoothly March 26, with Regions winning in a landslide, though our observation team observed more election day procedural violations in Severodonetsk than in other locations, suggesting that some old habits die hard. At least in Severodonetsk, concerns about voter list inaccuracies and polling station commission (PSC) understaffing proved less disruptive than the opposition Regions Party and the independent Committee of Voters of Ukraine (CVU) had predicted. Most Severodonetsk PSCs were formed a week late, but CVU thought that voters had had an adequate opportunity to check their names on the voter list, and only small numbers of voters were turned away on election day because their names were not on the voter list. The complexity of holding four elections at the same time, plus inadequate space in some polling stations, led to long lines and exhausted PSC staff, who were in many instances still counting votes late on March 27, with results reported to the Central Election Commission only on March 29. End summary.

Severodonetsk: from separatist rally to Regions' landslide  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Severodonetsk earned an enduring place on Ukraine's political map by hosting a frenzied separatist rally, which then-PM Yanukovich attended on November 28, 2004, at the height of the Orange Revolution. During Ukraine's March 26 Rada (Parliament) and local elections, we observed the election in Severodonetsk under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

[1](#)3. (U) In Luhansk oblast overall March 26, Regions scored a 74-percent outright victory (with 91 percent of the oblast vote tallied), largely consolidating the base Yanukovich established in the 2004 presidential election cycle, when he received over 90 percent of the vote, shifting the province's primary allegiance from Communist "red" to Regions' "blue" (ref A). In the 2002 Rada elections, the Communists won a plurality of 39.7 percent in the oblast, followed by the pro-Kuchma For a United Ukraine (from which Regions emerged) with 14.4%, SPDU(o) 9.5%, Vitrenko 4%, Our Ukraine 3.6%, the Socialists 3.1% and the Tymoshenko Bloc 1.4%.

[1](#)4. (U) Severodonetsk is an industrial city of 140,000 in Luhansk Oblast, near the border with Russia. Severodonetsk hosts the AZOT fertilizer plant, subject of a heated privatization dispute (it was privatized in November 2004 in the midst of the heated presidential election season); a massive oil refinery is located in the bordering city of Lisichansk. On March 25 in advance of the vote, we met with Sergey Kamyshan, head of the CVU's Severodonetsk branch; representatives of District Election Commission (DEC) 109; and with 4 polling station commissions (PSCs) in DEC 109. On election day, March 26, we visited 10 PSCs in DEC 109.

Problems with voter list, but not insurmountable  
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[1](#)5. (SBU) CVU's Kamyshan predicted there might be problems on election day due to the poor quality of the voter list, an assessment echoed by numerous PSCs. (In the end, however, the problems did not appear to be that great.) Kamyshan and the PSCs blamed the Voter List Working Groups (VLWGs) tasked with updating the voter list and the city administration heads charged with coordinating the VLWGs. The working groups failed to go door to door verifying people's information, as was expected. Separately, a PSC chairperson indicated that the VLWGs were hotbeds of nepotism and cronyism with relatives and friends being hired, but not

actually working on improving the voter list. Problems on the voter lists frequently cited by PSCs were bad computer transliterations of names and addresses from Russian to Ukrainian, some translations of street names from Russian to Ukrainian, and persons being listed at one address but actually living at another address. Both the CVU and PSCs thought that these problems were well within the capacity of PSCs to deal with on election day, an assessment that was borne out in our observation of the voting.

PSCs formed late, but good balance  
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16. (SBU) Similar fears that PSCs would not have sufficient staffing also went unrealized, with the DEC using the March 17 amendment to the parliamentary election law to top up PSC staffing. According to the DEC, additions were mostly people who worked at the same institution or business that hosted the PSC. The DEC indicated that 28 parties were represented on PSCs, with mainly small parties unable to supply commissioners. Visits to PSCs showed a good distribution of party representatives on PSCs, with representatives from a wide range of parties playing leadership roles. Kamyshan indicated that most PSCs opened 5-7 days late, an assessment verified by our discussions with PSC commissioners. Kamyshan and the PSCs thought this still gave voters sufficient time to check their names on the voter list and prevent themselves from being disenfranchised, an assessment borne out by our observation on election day, when the number of voters turned away by polling stations ranged from 0-10 per station.

Long lines, late counts  
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17. (SBU) The biggest concern voiced by the DEC and PSCs concerned the difficulty of administering four elections at the same time, particularly the time involved in counting the ballots by hand at large polling stations (2000-plus voters). These concerns were borne out as we observed long lines at some polling stations, particularly those with large numbers of registered voters, but too small a facility to handle the voters. PSC management played an important role, with well-run PSCs keeping lines outside the PSC proper to prevent overcrowding, and badly-run PSCs allowing everyone to wait inside, leading to standing-room only conditions that limited access to the booths/ballot boxes. We observed wait times averaging from 30 minutes to an hour at large urban PSCs. Fears of long vote counts also came to pass; we observed the vote count at PSC 17 in Severodonetsk, which took 12 hours to count 1672 parliamentary ballots. PSC 17's results finally appeared on the CEC website mid-day March 29 (accurately, we note). Conversations with OSCE/ODIHR's long-term observers in Luhansk indicated that these problems were endemic throughout Luhansk Oblast.

Possible fraud in local elections  
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18. (SBU) CVU's Kamyshan thought that, while administrative resources would not be used to influence the parliamentary election, falsifications were likely on the local level. Kamyshan alleged that Party of Regions twice rigged the selection process for the chairmanship of a Territorial Election Commission (TEC, the supervisory commission for the local elections) in Severodonetsk. The first time the TEC chairman was selected by random drawing, and the CVU filmed an official holding aside the envelope with the Party of the Regions commissioner's names so that it was drawn first. CVU sued to have the selection invalidated, but the local court threw out the suit; an appeals court overthrew this decision and ordered that the selection be redone. Suspiciously, on the repeat selection, Regions won again.

19. (SBU) During our observation, we identified some violations of election law in the outlying town of Rubizhne, likely connected with local elections there. At PSC 54, we observed PSC workers giving out ballots without checking the voter list, or even having a copy of the voter list on the table. When we asked to see the voter list, we were whisked away to see the PSC chairperson. When we returned with chairperson in tow, a voter list had appeared. In Rubizhne we also noted PSCs with 100-200 voters registered to vote from home. (Note: Ukrainian election law allows the elderly and sick to vote from home via a mobile ballot box. CVU in Severodonetsk had advised us that more than 50 mobile voters registered with a single PSC should be considered suspicious.) At PSC 65 in Rubizhne, the mobile ballot boxes were not stored in the open as required by law, but were kept in a back room, without control slips in them. PSC 65 had approximately 200 voters on the mobile list, but at 11:00 am the mobile boxes were empty and being kept in a back room, raising suspicions that they were going to be stuffed. We related this to fellow election observers with CVU, who sent a team to PSC 65 to investigate. When they spoke with the PSC Chairperson, she reportedly falsely claimed that we had been there at 6:15 am, thus explaining the lack of control

slips in the empty boxes. (Comment: The number of votes involved was relatively small on the national scale, but could be significant in local elections, particularly in city council or mayoral elections.)

Old habits die hard

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¶10. (SBU) Comment: The Embassy observation team in Severodonetsk witnessed more procedural violations than in other provinces covered by Embassy teams. Though circumstantial, the evidence was suggestive of abuses that had been commonplace on behalf of Regions' leader Yanukovych in 2004 when he ran for president (stacking committees, manipulating voters' lists, abusing mobile ballot boxes). While the actions in 2006 may well have been locally initiated and intended to boost performance in local elections, the violations stood in contrast to Regions Party efforts to project an image of concern over the integrity of the election process (refs B-C). In the end, the highlighted shortcomings in the voter list should have been addressed by the voter list working groups staffed by local administration officials, which in Severodonetsk at least mostly claim fealty to Regions.

¶11. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website:  
[www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev).  
Herbst